

A Velvet Touch

The books chosen for this list are linked by their affinity with velvet, but that's where the similarity ends. To the touch, velvet is rich, sensuous and finely woven – just like the language you will encounter in many of these stories. Velvet also has a deeper and darker side. Expect tales which evoke beautiful but disturbing worlds and also those which reveal mysterious secrets, lurking in both the past and the present.

Use this list to add a bit of luxury to your reading life. Consider the quality on offer and then spoil yourself. It might turn out to be the best choice you've made all year.

Read the introductions to each book and decide for yourself. Be generous, be daring – you can always swap the book for something else if it's not your cup of tea. But if you don't try... you'll never know!

Fasting, Feasting by Anita Desai

The fascination of this novel lies in the delicate snapshots of Indian family life. It's a rich tradition seen with a subtle, slightly wicked humour. You'll feel both frustrated and sympathetic as Uma and then her brother, Arun, consistently disappoint the loaded expectations of their parents. Sensual language and evocative sights and smells capture the essence of India – watch out for the descriptions of Mira-masi's pilgrimages; it's as close as you'll get to the real thing.



The Catastrophist by Ronan Bennett

Set in the Congo during its bid for independence in the early 1960s, this is both a compelling thriller and a fascinating love story. Bursting with rich and sensual language, the lush descriptions of the African landscape provide the perfect backdrop for a novel tense with political idealism, racial conflict, commitment and betrayal. You can feel the heat and passion just rising from the pages.



Air and Angels by Susan Hill

Velvet adorns every page – in the evocation of place (both Cambridge and imperial India) and of a bygone era where social position counts for much and the expectations of one's colleagues and parents carry great sway. The intricate weaving of the separate stories of middle-aged cleric, Thomas Cavendish, and Kitty, a dreamy teenage girl, will demand your full attention. Be prepared for torment, passion and guilt, but don't expect to get anything done until the last word has been read.



An Equal Music by Vikram Seth

Michael Holme is a professional violinist – disciplined and emotionally detached. But when an old flame reappears unexpectedly on the scene, his life plunges into an exhilarating, but potentially suicidal free-fall. This is a story rich in music, memories and forbidden passion. The language is lyrical and sweet to the ear. You don't have to know anything about Bach or Schubert to enjoy this read, but you might find it tempts you to browse in the Music section of the library on your next visit!



A Touch of... Get a sneak preview of ten great reads

Stuck for what to read next? Maybe you fancy trying something new but don't know where to start. **A Touch of** is a great way for readers who use large print, Braille or audio books to find that good read everyone is looking for. Whether you're choosing for yourself or for someone else who can't get to the library, **A Touch of** gives you a sneak preview of tempting possibilities. There are ten different booklists in the series, including A Touch of Terror, A Touch of Mischief, A Ticklish Touch and Touching Infinity.

A Velvet Touch features books available in large print and tells you which ones you can get in audio and Braille as well. If you prefer to start from what's available in audio or Braille, please ask for the ten **A Touch of** samplers which give you friendly introductions and a short extract from each book to listen to or touch read.

 Available from RNIB Talking Book Service

 Available from NLB in Braille

 Available from Calibre Cassette Library

 Available in audio through public libraries

If you would like more information about the services to readers offered by these organisations please ask a member of library staff. If you have internet access, you can check out www.nlbuk.org



Ice Cream by Helen Dunmore

This is an invitation to indulge your tastebuds; and, as the title of this collection of short stories suggests, you're in for a treat. Helen Dunmore presents you with a delicious array of goodies – all rich in colour, texture and flavour. The writing is sensuous; it slips down smoothly, just like melted ice cream. Sheer luxury. So make your choice, eat your fill – then come back later for more.



Anil's Ghost by Michael Ondaatje

This is a deep and dark novel about a country whose lush scenery and ancient culture hide a shameful secret. Anil Tissera, prodigal daughter, returns to Sri Lanka determined to discover the truth about the thousands of people who 'disappeared' during the civil war. In doing so, she must confront the ghosts of her own past as well of those of her country of birth. A challenging read in beautiful but dangerous territory.



The Hours by Michael Cunningham

This is a gorgeous shimmering treat of a novel. The chapters alternate between the lives of three women; Virginia Woolf at home in 1923; Laura Brown in 1949 Los Angeles; and Clarissa Vaughan in 1990s' New York. Exquisite and subtle, the velvet surface catches the shifting light, reflecting connections. It's poetic but also easy to read. Anyone who has ever baked a birthday cake will find it irresistible.



The Forest by Edward Rutherfurd

This is an epic novel, spanning hundreds of years of life within the vast sweep of the New Forest. The velvet here emerges in the rich tapestry of people, places and events, gilded with just the right amount of myth and magic, and woven skilfully into a fabulous whole. If you like your history accurate, but prefer it delivered in the form of a good read, then this might just be for you.



Eclipse by John Banville

This is a deep and at times troubling exploration of one man at a significant moment in his life. An actor by profession, Alex bottles out in the middle of the last act. He escapes to his dead mother's house – a kind of self imposed exile. There he is overwhelmed by memories from the past – his parents, his wife, his daughter. This is a wistful read, a story of the inner life not the world of action (or acting). The ending, as the moon passes across the sun, will haunt you long after the final page.

Five Quarters of the Orange by Joanne Harris

Joanne Harris's most recent novel, like the famous *Chocolat*, promises indulgence: an evocative setting in a beautiful village (this time the Loire valley) and sensual descriptions of mouth-watering food. You will find all that but there's also something much darker lurking here. Framboise, the heroine, is haunted by disturbing wartime family secrets, and there is much she must confront and lay to rest if she is to have any kind of peace of mind in the future.

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A Velvet Touch offers a fleeting, but sensual encounter with ten very different books. You may be a novice to such richness and luxury or perhaps you're already experienced in intricate weaving and hidden depths. Either way, the touch of velvet is impossible to resist...

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